



47 of 167 DOCUMENTS

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**HEADLINE:** State senator weighing run for mayor in crowded field; Joan Carter Conway of Northeast Baltimore tests name recognition

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**BODY:**

State Sen. Joan Carter Conway has formed an exploratory committee and will conduct a poll this weekend to test her name recognition for a possible mayoral run in this year's election, a consultant for the senator said yesterday.

Conway is one of 10 potential candidates, some undeclared, with no incumbent running and no clear front-runner.

"A lot of people feel there are a lot of mediocre candidates," said former Del. Kenneth L. Webster, a consultant on Conway's political team. "We believe if we're in it, we'll win it."

Conway could complicate the race for Mary W. Conaway, the city register of wills, because their last names are similar. The senator also could hurt City Council President Lawrence A. Bell III's candidacy because her legislative district in Northeast Baltimore, where she is popular, has been an important stronghold for Bell, who made his candidacy official this week. All three are Democrats.

Conaway, a declared candidate, said she isn't concerned about the similarity in the names. She said she wants to focus on issues rather than on who might join the race.

"People certainly know me from Joan Carter Conway," Conaway said. "First of all, we have two different first names. Voters are very sophisticated. They can read."

"I have not heard anything about her running. This is just speculation again about candidates."

Conway, a former council member, was appointed to the Senate in January 1997 after John A. Pica Jr. resigned to spend more time with his family and to practice law. Conway retained her seat after running unopposed last year.

She said during the General Assembly session that ended in April that she had not decided whether she would join

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the mayoral race. "I'm focusing on the work before me," she said at the time.

Webster and Tim Conway, the senator's husband, have been urging her to enter the race since Kweisi Mfume, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, announced Monday that he would not run for mayor.

The senator is on a two-week vacation, and Webster said the Conway team isn't rushing to make a decision because the July 6 filing deadline is more than a month away.

"She's one of the most vigorous campaigners in the city when she runs," Webster said.

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